DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 726 SP 041 564

AUTHOR	Wood, Teri; McCarthy, Chris
TITLE	Understanding and Preventing Teacher Burnout. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-SP-2002-03
PUB DATE	2002-12-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0007
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1307 New York Avenue, N.W., Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005-4701. Tel: 202-293-2450; Tel: 800-822-9229 (Toll Free); Fax: 202-457-8095; e-mail: query@aacte.org; Web site: http://www.ericsp.org.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; *Stress Management; *Teacher Burnout; Teacher Responsibility ; *Teaching Conditions
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; Primary Prevention

ABSTRACT

This digest explains that burnout results from the chronic perception that one is unable to cope with daily life demands. Teachers must face classrooms full of students every day; negotiate potentially stressful interactions with parents, administrators, counselors, and other teachers; contend with relatively low pay and shrinking school budgets; and ensure students meet increasingly strict standards. This can result in a form of burnout at some point in their careers. The digest looks at the nature of the stress response, describes the development of the burnout construct, and examines several types of prevention that can be useful in helping teachers contend with an occupation that puts them at risk for burnout. Primary prevention includes organizational practices which allow teachers some control over their daily challenges. Secondary prevention focuses on early detection of problems before they emerge as full-blown disorders. Tertiary prevention involves ameliorating symptoms of burnout. The digest concludes that primary prevention is preferable, but all types can be effective. (Contains 19 references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 477 726

Understanding and Preventing Teacher Burnout

ERIC Digest

By

Teri Wood and Chris McCarthy

December 2002 EDO-SP-2002-03

ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP041564

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ERIC
Educational Resources Information Center

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
1307 New York Ave., NW • Suite 300 • Washington, DC 20005-4701
(202) 293-2450 • (800) 822-9229 • http://www.ericsp.org

DIGEST

December 2002

EDO-SP-2002-03

Understanding and Preventing Teacher Burnout

Teri Wood, M.Ed. & Chris McCarthy, Ph.D.

Many teachers find the demands of being a professional educator in today's schools difficult and at times stressful. When work stress results in teacher burnout, it can have serious consequences for the health and happiness of teachers, and also the students, professionals, and families they interact with on a daily basis.

The Nature of the Stress Response

When a potentially threatening event is encountered, a reflexive, cognitive balancing act ensues, weighing the perceived demands of the event against one's perceived ability to deal with them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Events perceived as potential threats trigger the stress response, a series of physiological and psychological changes that occur when coping capacities are seriously challenged. The most typical trigger to the stress response is the perception that ones' coping resources are inadequate for handling life demands. According to current models of stress, we are constantly taking the measure of the daily demands we experience in life and comparing this to the resources we possess for dealing with them. If our resources appear equal to the demands, we view them as mere challenges. If, however, demands are viewed as exceeding our resources, they become stressors and trigger the stress response.

Accordingly, teacher stress may be seen as the perception of an imbalance between demands at school and the resources teachers have for coping with them (Esteve, 2000; Troman & Woods, 2001). Symptoms of stress in teachers can include anxiety and frustration, impaired performance, and ruptured interpersonal relationships at work and home (Kyriacou, 2001). Researchers (Lecompte & Dworkin, 1991; Farber, 1998; Troman & Woods, 2001) note that teachers who experience stress over long periods of time may experience what is known as burnout.

Development of the Burnout Construct

Matheny, Gfroerer, and Harris (2000) noted that earlier research into the phenomenon described burnout as a loss of idealism and enthusiasm for work. Freudenberger (1974), a psychiatrist, is largely credited with first using the term. Maslach and Jackson refined the meaning and measurement of the burnout construct in the 1980s (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993) to include three sub-domains: (1) depersonalization, in which one distances oneself from others and views others impersonally; (2) reduced personal accomplishment, in which one devalues one's work with others; and (3) emotional exhaustion, in which one feels emptied of personal emotional resources and becomes highly vulnerable to stressors. In particular, depersonalization may be expressed through poor attitudes towards students and the work environment.

Teachers may be at greater risk for depersonalization because their daily work life often includes large doses of isolation from their professional peers. While teachers do interact with others on a regular basis throughout the workday, the majority of such interactions are with students, and not with other teachers or professional staff members who might better understand the demands teachers face. Factors such as the physical layout of most campuses, with teachers working alone in their classrooms, and scheduling constraints that make finding time to meet with peers virtually impossible, can cause teachers to feel disconnected (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990). This depersonalization may act as a protective mechanism, as evidenced by the descriptions of "worn-out" teachers, whose cynical views towards students and teaching allowed them to continue to remain in the field, even in a diminished capacity (Farber, 1998). While depersonalization may act as some protection for teachers, it also may encourage isolation, strengthening the risk for burnout.

An important finding from early studies was that teachers at risk for burnout came to see their work as futile and inconsistent with the ideals or goals they had set as beginning teachers (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). Other early studies cited role conflict and role ambiguity as significantly related to burnout (Dworkin, 1986). Role conflict occurs when a teacher is faced with conflicting expectations of the job. For example, role conflict may arise from discrepancies between ideals of what it means to be a good teacher. Role ambiguity relates more to a sense of confusion about one's goals as a teacher including a sense of uncertainty about the responsibilities related to teaching.

LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) developed a more extensive description of burnout as an extreme type of role-specific alienation with a focus on feelings of meaninglessness, especially as this applies to one's ability to successfully reach students, a finding also supported by Farber (1998). LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) identified powerlessness in defining professional roles as being instrumental in creating stress. Additionally, a sense of both physical and mental exhaustion exacerbated by the belief that expectations for teachers are constantly in flux, or in conflict with previously held beliefs, has been cited by numerous researchers as influencing teacher burnout (Bullough & Baughmann, 1997; Brown & Ralph, 1998; Hinton & Rotheiler, 1998; Esteve, 2000; Troman & Woods, 2001).

Prevention Of Burnout

Albee (2000), one of the pioneers of prevention research, points out that, "It is accepted public health doctrine that no disease or disorder has ever been treated out of existence" (p. 847). It is far better if the roots of teacher burnout are identified and eliminated before the syndrome develops, rather than treating it after it has already occurred. Across the various medical professions, a distinction has been made between three levels of prevention interventions: (a) Primary prevention, where the goal is to reduce the incidence of new cases of a disorder, (b) secondary prevention, where the goal is early identification and treatment of symptoms before they turn into a full-blown disorder, and (c) tertiary prevention, where persons who have recently suffered a disorder receive some type of intervention to prevent relapse (Conyne, 1991). Such preventative interventions may either be done at the organizational level, with changes in the school environment, or at the individual level, in which the goal is to strengthen teachers' resources for resisting stress.

Primary Prevention of Teacher Burnout

Organizational practices that prevent teacher burnout are generally those that allow teachers some control over their daily challenges. At the individual level, self-efficacy and the ability to maintain perspective with regard to daily events have been described as "anxiety-buffers" (Greenberg, 1999). At the institutional level, other factors may help mitigate teacher stress. Chris Kyriacou (2001), who draws from an Education Service Advisory Committee report (1998), offers the following advice for schools:

- Consult with teachers on matters, such as curriculum development or instructional planning, which directly impact their classrooms.
- Provide adequate resources and facilities to support teachers in instructional practice.
- Provide clear job descriptions and expectations in an effort to address role ambiguity and conflict.
- Establish and maintain open lines of communication between teachers and administrators to provide administrative support and performance feedback that may

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

act as a buffer against stress.

· Allow for and encourage professional development activities such as mentoring and networking, which may engender a sense of accomplishment and a more fully developed professional identity for teachers.

Secondary Prevention of Teacher Burnout

Efforts at secondary prevention focus primarily on early detection of problems before they emerge as full-blown disorders. Symptoms of teacher stress as contributing to burnout may take many forms (Brown & Ralph, 1998). Studies by several researchers (c.f., Brown & Ralph, 1998; Hinton & Rotheiler, 1998; Kyriacou, 2001; Troman & Woods, 2001), report the following as early symptoms of teacher stress and burnout:

· Feeling like not going to work or actually missing days
· Having difficulty in concentrating on tasks
· Feeling overwhelmed by the workload and having a related sense of inadequacy to the tasks given to them
· Withdrawing from colleagues or engaging in conflictual relationships with co-workers
· Having a general feeling of irritation regarding school
· Experiencing insomnia, digestive disorders, headaches, and heart palpitations
· Incapacitation and an inability to function professionally in severe instances

Tertiary Prevention - Ameliorating Burnout Symptoms

Once teacher burnout has occurred, a decision must be made as to whether the teacher can or is willing to continue their work. Troman and Woods (2001) acknowledge that a series of stressful events or a single major event may lead teachers to make what they term 'pivotal decisions.' Although teachers go through many such events over the course of a career, the teachers interviewed by Troman and Woods rarely viewed decisions made in response to high levels of stress as transformative in the positive sense. Personal factors also figure into a teacher's decision to stay in a school, with the current labor market, personal financial and family obligations, and years in the field all being instrumental in the decision making process. In hard economic times, teachers may stay with the relatively stable profession of teaching due to a lack of outside possibilities for a career change. The promise of retirement benefits that increase with added years of service is a draw to teachers who have already accumulated more than a few years of service.

In looking at teachers and stress, Troman and Woods (2001) used interviews and observational data collected from teachers teaching at The Gladstone Primary School and from teachers who had left the school in the aftermath of Gladstone being designated as poorly performing during an accreditation inspection. Interviews were analyzed using theme analysis and the constant comparative method. Data gathered suggests that teachers generally fall into three categories when reacting to stress and burnout. Some teachers simply end their careers as professional educators. Others seek relief from stress by "downshifting:" taking a less prestigious or demanding role at the school, redefining their job as a part time instructor, or by having previously held duties assigned to other teachers. Some teachers choose to reframe their sense of identity as educators; for these teachers, this may involve developing outside interests, placing more emphasis on family and friends or relocating to a more favorable school environment.

Summary

Burnout results from the chronic perception that one is unable to cope with daily life demands. Given that teachers must face a classroom full of students every day, negotiate potentially stressful interactions with parents, administrators, counselors, and other teachers, contend with relatively low pay and shrinking school budgets, and ensure students meet increasingly strict standards of accountability, it is no wonder many experience a form of burnout at some point in their careers. Efforts at primary prevention, in which teachers' jobs are modified to give them more control over their environment and more resources for coping with the demands of being an educator, are preferable over secondary or tertiary interventions that occur after burnout symptoms have surfaced. However, research reviewed here indicates each type of prevention can be useful in helping teachers contend with an occupation that puts them at risk for burnout.

References

Albee, G. W. (2000). Commentary on prevention and counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 28, 845-853.

Bennett, K. P. & LeCompte, M. D. (1990). *The Way Schools Work: A Sociological Analysis of Education*. New York: Longman.

Brown, M. & Ralph, S. (1998). The identification of stress in teachers. In J. Dunham & V. Varma (Eds.) *Stress in Teachers: Past, Present and Future*. (pp. 37-56) London: Whurr Publishers Ltd.

Bullough, Jr., R. V., & Baughman, K. (1997). *"First Year Teacher" Eight Years Later: An inquiry into teacher development*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Conyne, R. K. (1991). Gains in primary prevention: Implications for the counseling prevention. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 69, 277-279.

Dworkin, A. G. (1986). *Teacher Burnout in the Public Schools: Structural Causes and Consequences for Children*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Education Service Advisory Committee (1998). *Managing work-related stress: a guide for managers and teachers in the schools*. In Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: directions for future research. *Educational Review*, 53(1), 27-35.

Esteve, J. M. (2000). The transformation of the teachers' role at the end of the twentieth century: new challenges for the future. *Educational Review*, 52(2), pp. 197-207.

Farber, B. A. (1998). *Tailoring treatment strategies for different types of burnout*. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, 106th, San Francisco California, August 14-18.

Freudenberger, H. J. (1974). Staff burnout. *Journal of Social Issues*, 30(1), 159-165.

Greenberg, J. S. (1999). *Comprehensive stress management* (6th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Hinton, J. W. & Rotheiler, E. (1998). The psychophysiology of stress in teachers, in J. Dunham, & V. Varma (eds.) *Stress in Teachers: Past, Present and Future*. (pp. 95-119) London: Whurr Publishers Ltd.

Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: directions for future research. Educational Review, 53(1), pp. 28-35.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). Coping and adaptation. In W. D. Gentry (Ed.), The handbook of behavioral medicine (pp. 282-325). New York: Guilford.

LeCompte, M. D., & Dworkin, A. G. (1991). Giving Up on School: Student Dropouts and Teacher Burnouts. Newbury Park, California: Corwin Press.

Maslach, C. & Jackson, S. E. (1981). The measurement of experienced burnout. Journal of Occupational Behavior, 2, 99-113.

Maslach, C. & Schaufeli, W. B. (1993). Historical and conceptual development of burnout. In C. Maslach, W. B. Schaufeli, & T. Marek (Eds.), Professional burnout: Recent developments in theory and research (pp. 1-16). Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.

Matheny, K. B., Gfroerer, C. A., & Harris, K. (2000). Work stress, burnout, and coping at the turn of the century: An Adlerian perspective. Journal of Individual Psychology, 56(1), 74-87.

Troman, G. & Woods, P. (2001). Primary Teachers' Stress. New York: Routledge/ Falmer.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education
1-800-822-9229 http://www.ericsp.org query@aacte.org

Mary E. Dilworth, Director
Catalina Boggio, Associate Director

Teri Woods & Chris McCarthy, University of Texas - Austin (Authors)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

This digest is in the public domain and may be reproduced.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under contract number ED-99-CO-0007. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of or policies of the U. S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U. S. Government.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
X	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").